

chapter 14

Activist Academic Whore: Negotiating the Fractured Otherness Abyss

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I AM A WHORE, an academic, and sometimes (I suspect) an academic whore. In this chapter, I reflect on the challenges and tensions I experience as a university-embedded unrepentant retired sex worker and current activist doing research on the sex industry. Drawing on my own experiences, I seek to destabilize neat categorizations and self-congratulatory platitudes by drawing on Foucault, Goffman, and feminist theory to explore questions of politics (and power): the politics of identity, stigma, and legitimacy; the politics of voice (who speaks, in whose voice, whose truth, and to what end); and the politics of research, of poking and prying, of coding and of “making sense.” It is these interwoven themes that structure this chapter. Resurrecting a slogan from the days when feminism was called “women’s lib” – the “personal is political” – I start by positioning the discussion within my personal and professional journey.

My Journey

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, between dropping out of high school and attending university, I was a feminist, a single mother, and a sex worker. I worked as a street-based (and periodically truck stop-based) sex worker, an in-call worker in a brothelette, an erotic dancer in strip clubs, and a peep show attendant. While I was not a particularly good, or skilful, or successful sex worker,¹ I certainly did not feel exploited or dirty; nor was I, much to the dismay of the journalists who eagerly probe for titillating stories of violence, abuse, and sexual degradation,² ever raped at work or “pimped.” I did not hate (or love) the work. Indeed, my experience was above all banal – sex

work was simply a good way to earn much-needed money to support my son and myself. Of course, perception is contextually conditioned; surrounded by supportive nonjudgmental people who were endeavouring to work and live ethically without attending overmuch to dominant definitions of morality, I did not feel subversive, outrageous, or immoral.

I had no problem reconciling my job with my feminist consciousness; after all, I was committed to women's equality, believed in our right to choose, and was confident in my right, as a modern 1970s woman, to decide what I would do with my body – I could choose to have a baby or not; I could choose to have sex for fun or for money.³

My "naïve" interpretation of liberation and my confident assurance was destabilized the night I joined a group of like-minded feminist strippers to view the antipornography film *Not a Love Story* (Kleing 1981).⁴ In that theatre, I was surprised to learn that I was not only a victim (something I had not hitherto realized) but also, like Linda Lee Tracey, complicit in patriarchal oppression, "a part of it ... serv[ing] the whole thing." That experience was disturbing, and I left the theatre feeling dirty and objectified by a discourse that appropriated and transformed my experience. Indeed, I left that theatre with a new identity thrust upon my consciousness.

In the years that followed, I found myself experiencing that feeling of *dis-ease* and frustration when I spent many hours in university lecture halls where highly educated academics confidently asserted that women like me were either exploited and abused victims, or maladjusted, deviant, and hypersexual. I also "learnt" that in criminology-speak my supportive community was a criminogenic subculture! Long before I had ever heard of Michel Foucault, I, well indoctrinated into the hierarchy of knowledge, "got" power-knowledge (Foucault 1980) and obligingly struggled to reconcile these authoritative discourses with my own experiences. I squirmed with discomfort as I worked to squeeze my consciousness into a discursive suit that did not fit no matter how much I tried. I grappled in silence and shame and said nothing. I was silenced by my lack of academic language and legitimacy; by the absence of a space for my experience within feminist, criminological, and sociological discourses; and by the discourses themselves, which delegitimized me and denied my agency. Most importantly, I was silenced by my fear of stigma, of judgment, of being identified as the outsider that I "knew" I was.

Ironically, or perhaps inevitably, the same disciplines that transformed me into an "object of sociological inquiry" (Smith 1987, 1170; emphasis added) also (eventually) furnished the tools to resist and assert my subjectivity.⁵ In the 1990s, when I was doing my doctoral work, we were in the throes of the postmodern debate and a space was opening up to bring my political/personal agenda into the academy. I was fortunate enough to benefit from the

convergence of the firmly entrenched (though periodically maligned) “sociology of the underdog” (Polsky 1969); the emergent (though yet unnamed) “convict criminology” that affirmed the significance of the “insider” (Jones 1995); the scholarship of (often racialized) academic pioneers that confirmed the imperative of integrating “outsiders” not just as witnesses and informants but as the producers of knowledge (Davis 1981, 1989); cultural feminists writing on “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988); and feminists more general increasing valorization of the experiential voice (DeVault 1990). None of this immunized me from feelings of being an outsider in the unselfconsciously conventional academy, an institution that reflects and reaffirms class stratification and where the know/known dichotomy is not only entrenched but is a foundational principle. It did, however, afford me an affirming point of entry – a solid, *ethical* even *trendy* space.⁶ Indeed, if I am to be honest, it gave me more than that. It gave, and continues to give, me a certain cache, a privileged status and legitimacy among a select group of critical academics who believe profoundly in the significance of experiential, reflective analysis and who value the outsider-within.

Somewhat atypical, mine was not a particularly remarkable journey. It is, however, one that resulted in the accumulation of a mismatched set of political, academic, and personal baggage, a bicultural sensitivity, a rather ambiguous identity location, and a disconcerting, fractured otherness. In the coming section, I explore how these intersections play out in my research. I start by attending to the question of stigma.

Negotiating Normative and Inverse Stigmas: Too Much of a Whore for the Academy, Too Academic for the Whores⁷

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963, 3) defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting,” that transforms a person (in the minds of others) “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” More to the point, Goffman drew our attention to the significance of the “relationship between attribute and stereotype” (*ibid.*, 4). In other words, an individual possesses a particular attribute to which a cluster of stereotypes cling. Dominant sex worker stereotypes include assumptions of victimization, disease, drug addiction, and lack of agency (Jeffrey and MacDonald 2006). The whore stigma is so insidious that it “spoils” the identity of the marked, and, unlike other “tainted” jobs such as morticians, custodians, and used car salesmen, the occupational stigma is constructed as a personal attribute so that the implications extend beyond the sphere of work; the label becomes a “master status” (Hughes 1945) that has permanence across social space. It also adheres across time – even being an *ex-sex* worker is an identity

marker that can be ascribed definitive value. Indeed, today, almost thirty years after my short-lived sex work “career,” the media regularly identifies me as a “former sex worker and University of Ottawa professor,” leaving little doubt as to which identity is the most significant.

My personal journey may have been political, but that does not mean that I did not endeavour to protect myself by carefully editing my biography. For many years, I omitted this specific part of my journey – at least until I was secure in my audience. For many years, I lived not only the lie of omission but also a conceptual disconnect: after all, I did not “buy into” the discourse that I should be either traumatized by, or ashamed of, my work in the sex industry. More importantly, I had a nagging suspicion that by allowing myself to be invisible I was implicitly supporting what I perceived to be the exploitative prohibitionist rhetoric.⁸ I justified the decision to myself: What business is my past? What is the point? Did I really want to hurt my aging parents? These convenient truths masked a deeper reality: I was profoundly afraid of the consequences of “coming out.” I was afraid of real material consequences – of being fired from my job, of not getting into graduate school, of being dismissed, of being (mis)appropriated by feminist scholars. Perhaps even more, I, a budding “serious” scholar, feared that on the basis of my past experiences I would become a token, a novelty, the embodiment of the liberal academy. Feeling dirty and dishonest, I was an *ambivalent* passer (Goffman 1963) – and perhaps, for that reason I was not a particularly *good* one. Over and over again, I let the mask slip. I spoke too passionately, or used too many insider examples, or employed the “wrong” pronoun. Far too often, I heard the sharp intake of breath, the perplexed look and then observed the reflection in someone’s eyes as they stripped away my veneer and reassessed me in light of this new (and apparently significant) identity. At the end of this private status degradation *moment*,⁹ I found myself standing exposed as esteem was replaced by pity, contempt, dismissal, or titillation. Sometimes the experience was different. With those who either directly or indirectly shared my “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963), I saw suspicion replaced by connection. Such is the power of shared stigma that our differences slipped away (at least for the moment), our bodies relaxed, our vocabulary shifted, and our conversation deepened.

Ultimately, I knew I had to “come out” not only because the duplicity of championing sex worker rights while continuing to conceal my own experience was disconcertingly hypocritical, but also because I felt compelled to put myself on the line to demonstrate “the kind of woman who is/was a whore.” Of course, my ability to out myself speaks powerfully to the tremendous privilege of my specific location. Nonetheless, mindful of potential consequences, I eased, rather than walked, out of the proverbial closet. More specifically, I

disclosed that I was a retired erotic dancer when I got my probationary (tenure-stream) university position and only spoke publicly of my more “disreputable” past as a prostitute when I had the security of tenure. Today, I still worry what my uncle will think, and I still sometimes hear the sharp intake of breath. And I still see the perplexed reassessment as my audience seeks to reconcile what they (wrongly) presume to be contradictory identities. And I still sometimes hear annoyingly patronizing congratulations – “Good girl,” “You have done really well for yourself!” For the most part, however, being a tenured professor is a privileged space that goes a long way to mediating (albeit not erasing) the whore stigma. Cocooned in a circle of amazing nonjudgmental and supportive colleagues, and buffered by the markers of respectability (promotion, research funding, publications), I am firmly “inside” the normative order and enjoy the many advantages of that location. I have increasingly found that being a *retired* whore (who has by definition abandoned the behaviour even if the identity is not so easily discarded) can be (more or less) accepted. Indeed, sometimes it is even lauded in an education industry interested in marketing itself to youthful consumers.

Ironically, being an activist appears to render me a suspect scholar whose commitment to research rigour is open to question. It is in relation to my activism, perhaps not incidentally where my lack of repentance is most evident, that I am most likely to be accused of bias, my past most readily employed as a tool to discount and the slipperiness of the discrediting and delegitimizing “whore stigma” (Pheterson 1989) is rendered painfully obvious. For example, upon the release of a community-based research report,¹⁰ a local media outlet article started with the assertion that, “a report *created* by a University of Ottawa prof *claims* that city police routinely harass workers” (Jackson 2010, 3; emphasis added). Similarly, in response to a newspaper article in which I publicly defended sex workers’ right to advertise their services on a popular Internet site, one reader was inspired to comment, “Bruckert a former stripper turned university professor. So much for being impartial. Can we have studies that aren’t done by the self-interested?” (*Ottawa Citizen* 2010). Finally, less personal and hurtful, though more significantly speaking to the structural impact of stigma slippage and the entrenched power-knowledge dialectic, is institutional delegitimation. In her 2010 decision, Justice Himel of the Superior Court of Ontario carefully ascribed greater credibility to those academic expert witnesses who are not activists and are therefore presumably more objective).¹¹

If I have found a safe, if occasionally marginal and periodically suspect, space within the middle-class workplace, I find that I inhabit a somewhat ambivalent location in the sex worker community.¹² Here, I am not only stripped of the status and privilege that I wear with disconcerting ease, but

the veracity of Foucault's (1982) power relations (as opposed to monolithic power over) is undeniable.¹³ Since we can hardly argue that power relations are dynamic and constitutive (Foucault 1982) without recognizing the potency of inverse stigma, it is perhaps not surprising that I am also confronted with the fact that stigmatization is not a one-way street. In this "other" space where intragroup common-knowledge is scripted into the "the hidden transcript" (Scott 1990), being an academic is potentially a deeply discrediting attribute. Some of the stigmatic assumptions speak to a more general (class-cultural) inverse (or reverse) stigma¹⁴ in the identity ascribed to *overeducated* academics who are characterized as ivory tower theoreticians far removed from the *real* world. Academic "accents" continue to be read as arrogant or elitist in spite of fact that the line between the academy and sex work has become rather porous since the early 2000s, when we began to see convergences that speak to complex intersections.¹⁵ On the one hand, technological innovations, third-wave feminism, and students turning to sex work to pay rapidly rising student fees/expenses have made sectors of the sex industry decidedly middle-class (Bernstein 2007). On the other hand, out sex workers are going to graduate from school and claim academic space/authority with increasing frequency.

In the sex worker community, there is a further cluster of (discredited) characteristics that cling to this more general stigma. On occasion, it is engendered by the mistaken assumption that academics profit directly from research funds. Upon reflection, this is hardly surprising; the costs of research are invisible to most people (not just sex workers) who are unfamiliar with the process. While this particular stigma can be resolved through transparency regarding expenses, there is a more profound issue based on scholars' historic exploitation and (mis)appropriation of sex workers' lives and realities. For years, sex workers (and poor people, and prisoners, and the homeless, and the list goes on) have seen their words and their experiences transformed into data, appropriated, and used to advance the careers of academics. Far too often, "a story or statement that, in its oral form, is 'by' the speaker, very often reaches the public in the form of a text 'by' the scholar" (Gluck and Patai 1991, 2); insights from the community are transformed into an academic's "findings." Small wonder members of marginalized communities feel used. In sex worker spaces, academics are (often, not always) "marked" as exploitative – they are *whores* – but not in a good way.¹⁶ Indeed, while some groups endorse collaborative research, I have also sat at numerous meetings and been told that under no circumstances should research be supported. Academics exploit sex workers – they earn degrees, promotions, and status on the backs of sex workers. Period. End of discussion. Conscious of the irony I nonetheless find it disconcerting and remarkably unpleasant to be the object of a discourse

I myself have frequently made and the target of the very resistance I am usually so anxious to celebrate (Bruckert 2000, 2002, 2004, 2012).

How to respond? Instinctively, I want to counter and defend the academy I so often critique. I want to say that while some academics have clearly exploited sex workers to further their own careers, others have taken an extremely principled approach to the issues and actively championed sex workers' rights. I want to say that tarring all academics with the same brush is not only unfair, it is exactly the sort of sweeping stereotypical assessments that sex workers are mobilizing against. I want to say that research can be useful to sex workers. I want to say that while we must problematize the power optics, the reality is that the academy is the first point of contact for policymakers and, as such, sex worker and researcher communities need to strategize. I want to defend myself and find myself shamelessly rehearsing my own intragroup stigmatizing tropes.¹⁷ I also want to say that it would be easier not to put myself on the line, find a "safe" topic, and insolate myself from the subject-object tension and my discredited identity. I want to say that I feel compelled to work in this area precisely for the reasons they enunciate. I *want* to say all that but I rarely *do*. Once again I am silenced by my fear – my fear of being judged, of being stigmatized, of being recognized as the outsider I fear I am. I am also silenced by a nagging fear that they are right.

As my disjointed stigmatized identities converge, I find myself seeking to resolve the questions that bubble up: Who is *the* expert? Certainly marginalized people are the experts of their own lives; however, are they the only experts? Are they the experts of others' lives? Is a sex worker necessarily the expert of the industry? Is there a hierarchy of experiential expertise, and if so what is it based on? Fearful of being pulled into a postmodern vortex, I struggle to reconcile my political commitment to the sex worker rights movement and the nagging academic in my head who chants, "research *is* important – an *authentic* voice is not a *representative* voice."¹⁸ But of course, this pushes me relentlessly to another set of tensions: to what purpose do we undertake research? How do we acknowledge experiential expertise, make research useful to marginalized communities at the same time as undertake rigorous research in keeping with the demands of the academy? In the remainder of the chapter, I engage with these questions before presenting my modest model of ethical academic whoredom.

Negotiating the Tensions: Academic? Whore? Academic Whore?

Why do we social scientists undertake research? The answers come easily – to make sense, to shed light, to render the invisible visible. Some of us would add, to influence policy and for social change. If we were to be completely

honest, we would also have to say that we do research because it is our job, to gain promotion, for prestige, for self-validation, and for professional status. In other words, we do research in our own interests, in society's interests, and in the interests of knowledge. Of course, there is something profoundly contradictory in these goals. There is also a destabilizing acceptance of the normative social order (not to mention arrogance) in our justifications for "poking and prying" (Hurston 1942, 143) into the lives of others. Outside the safety of the hallowed halls of the academy, in rooms filled with sex workers, that arrogance is rendered visible and the contradictions brought into sharp relief. Here, I find my defence of "*good* intentions" rings hollow and claim of *good* (i.e., respectful and ethical) research have little resonance. Here, my complicity in the relations of power-knowledge cannot be wiped away with carefully constructed academic prose. Here, I must engage with these issues of research and expertise that traverse broader issues of ethics and of power.

The first issue is relevance. As an academic, I firmly believe that challenging modernist hegemonic truth claims (reflected in the dominant discourse) by putting all those other truths "on the record" and then developing respectful inclusionary conceptual frameworks is a useful undertaking. It allows us to unpack some of the most detrimental ideas about marginalized communities. I also firmly believe that the theoretical tools of my discipline can catalogue social processes and practices that "have no name" and reveal individual issues to be social problems. For example, drawing on labour theory illuminates the skills and competencies of sex workers; stigma theory focuses our attention on the interconnections between prejudice, interpersonal struggles, and self-esteem; structural stigma alerts us to the embedded stigmatic assumptions of policy. All of this, if it is accessible (which of course it is not if it is tucked away in peer-reviewed articles and/or expensive books and/or written in academese), can be very affirming and helpful to sex workers and their organizations. Many community members would likely agree. It is, however, a question of priority; these investigations simply do not have the same urgency to a sex worker who is preoccupied with much more immediate issues. Research imposes expectations (which at times feels suspiciously like the off-loading of academic work onto the community), and sex worker groups all too often find themselves burdened by demands on their resources but without their timelines, priorities, and questions taken into account.¹⁹ To add salt to the wound, while sex worker organizations are struggling on shoestring budgets and volunteering their time, privileged university-based researchers are receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars to study *them*.²⁰

The challenge posed by being desirable, trendy, or exotic objects of inquiry speaks to another issue – the academy has become increasingly product-oriented with ever-expanding expectations for academic output. Since

academics have to have *something* to write in all those carefully counted peer-reviewed articles, and since the existence of sex worker rights groups has rendered indoor workers accessible objects of knowledge,²¹ it is perhaps not surprising that these organizations are inundated with requests from research “tourists”²² – undergraduate and graduate students and professors – as well as the media, all of whom want to “talk to a *real* sex worker” and feel entitled to take workers’ time with their unending personal questions before disappearing from sight, presumably to go off and write all those articles/thesis/term papers.²³

The third concern is more focused on duplicity. Sex workers are incensed with the many academics (some no doubt well-intentioned) who have not only twisted and manipulated their stories to fit their own preconceptions (*theoretical frameworks*, in academe-speak) but have been so committed to a theoretical or ideological position that the very questions they ask have restricted rather than illuminated (Weldon 2010). For sex workers, the implications of this academic imperialism are *real*: “Sex work texts portray sex workers as living troubled, conflicted, torturous lives; disrupting social norms facing the consequences of social exclusion and victimhood. The biggest stigmas I face in my life stem from academic writing about my work” (E. Jeffreys 2010).

That said, there is another, more elusive issue than the subjectivity of the researcher and whether or not the particular conceptual framework is the “right” one. Of course, we need to be conscientious and respectful and *listen* to what participants are saying, but these important measures do not solve the problem. Duplicity is built into the research process. There are always some areas of the research agenda that are not fully revealed. At the very least, the extent of analysis and abstraction is unlikely to be shared at the onset of data collection. This problem is exacerbated in grounded research where, by definition, the researcher herself does not know where the research is *going*. Perhaps the term *consent* itself is misleading, suggesting informants are acquiescing to a process when in fact they cannot, their best efforts notwithstanding, be fully aware of its implications.

Duplicity is arguably embedded in the research process. However, in community-based research the potential is layered. To be clear, genuine community-based research that begins with the community has incredible potential to redress power relations and “foster new knowledge, tools and methods to develop the best strategies for diverse aspects of intervention, action research, program delivery and policy development” (SSHRC n.d.). When such partnerships become a prerequisite for funding, however, we have a new research orthodoxy valorizing instrumental collaborations that potentially (somewhat perversely) cement the expertise of academics on the basis

of their rhetorical acceptance/inclusion of community knowledge.²⁴ More troubling is the disconcerting potential of well-intentioned community-based research to “reinscribe and retrench unjust relations” (de Leeuw, Cameron, and Greenwood 2012, 185). For example, when funds disproportionately support the privileged academics (student stipends, professor’s release from teaching, travel to academic conferences) and not the (much) less privileged community “partners” who are expected to provide (often for token or no compensation) their time and expertise, access to the community, and the (all important) gloss of authenticity then social stratification; when this happens, the very things community-based researchers are (ostensibly) challenging (both methodologically and empirically) are reproduced. It is simple – when academics own data and when community members are *consulted* on a research protocol designed by academics, then knowledge is not being co-produced and the partnership is, at best, a euphemism. Funding bodies may be fooled by such faux partnerships – sex workers see right through it.

This brings us to the fourth issue – the presumptuousness of the research endeavour: research necessitates that we read *across* lives in order “tease out” themes. Indeed, embedded in the research process is a claim to the right, the ability, and indeed the *authority* to make sense of another person’s story and to give form and therefore meaning to another’s life (Hampsten 1989). The researcher collects, edits, and analyzes to produce a text in which the experiences are transformed into data – data that were extracted, decontextualized, deconstructed, and then temporally or thematically organized. In light of this, it is amazing that researchers will, without any conscious sense of irony, refuse to speak to the media about the social issues they investigate for fear of having their words taken out of context. It is even more amazing that we demonstrate our cleverness by sprinkling our texts with the gems we have mined (Connors 1986) – quotes that have been abstracted from the contexts of the interview and the lives out of which they emerged, and then carefully presented in the different context of an analytic piece – and then assume a moral high ground by asserting that we are “giving voice” to marginalized people. Indeed, this brings us to my last point.

Sex workers have mobilized and organized into rights groups since the 1970s, and there are for-and-by groups in most major centres in Canada as well as in locations around the world. Since the 1980s, these politicized groups have developed an impressive body of knowledge and are actively seeking to insert their voice in a conversation that has for too long been “about them, without them,” arguing that sex workers are the experts.²⁵ Of course, it is not so simple. Sex workers do not speak in one voice, and while their organizations reflect the positions of many works, they do not (even if it was logically possible, which it is not) speak for all sex workers. Undeniably,

sex worker organizations, like neighbourhood associations, civil rights leagues, feminist anti-abortion groups, or indeed any affiliated collective, have their own intellectually worked up perspectives that are reflected in their agendas. That said, since none of this is unique to sex workers – the same things are most certainly true of researchers and the academic community – it should not in any way delegitimize sex workers' authority to speak. Indeed, when we recognize that social actors are the real “experts of their own lives,” we have to wonder why the media, parliamentary subcommittees, and scholars turn to the (research) expert and draw on the experiential knowledge of sex workers to illustrate – implicitly positioning lived truths as second-rate.

Why this is the case is a significant question that speaks to the virility of “hierarchies of credibility” (Becker 1967, 241), affirms the enduring power-knowledge dialectic, and neatly demonstrates the entrenchment of modernist notions of Truth. We also see the insidious nature of stigma; those people who have the most profound knowledge are silenced by a discourse that discredits them as either victims to be pitied and saved or immoral, deviant, or dirty. In either case, their words can be blissfully ignored or appropriated or transformed by those who have the educational, cultural, and class capital to speak authoritatively in their stead. Evidently, knowledge does not exist outside of power – it is woven into its very fabric. Appreciating this dynamic sheds a harsh light on academic privilege and the need to take an ethical position.

Being an Ethical Academic Whore

In my doctoral dissertation, I confidently wrote of “integrating a much-needed voice into the discourse” and asserted “giving voice to marginalized populations was one of the better uses of academic privilege.” I imagined myself an academic warrior who would undertake meaningful research with sex workers. After all, I came from a good, solid, and deeply committed place. Now, more than a decade later, I continue to struggle. My initial optimism that I could simply participate with the community, take direction from the community, and do research that is useful – in other words, participatory action research (Barnsley and Ellis 1992) – was more complicated and ethically challenging than the warm and fuzzy descriptions would have us believe.²⁶

Ultimately, though the path was characterized by self-doubt and missteps, I am absolutely convinced that negotiating the insider-outsider tensions is a worthwhile endeavour. In the process, I have had to look long and hard at myself, my way of being in the world, my ambition, and just how much of a whore I am prepared to be. It has forced me to recognize that the status I, a white highly educated, well-paid, middle-class woman, enjoy is not an

entitlement, something I have earned and therefore deserve, but a privilege; and with privilege comes responsibility. In the end, however, there are a couple of very simple intersecting rules that are no less valid by virtue of their quaint moralistic echo of a bygone era: be respectful, be honest, share, speak up, and know your place!

Appreciating that members of researched communities are the experts immediately engenders respect – respect for knowledge, for insights, and for people's ability to make sense of their own lives (see Dell, Fillmore, and Kilty, this volume). This does not mean we abandon concepts and theories. Rather, it serves as a powerful antidote to reading over our informants and imposing alien and alienating meanings. Evidently, this results in an ongoing, somewhat schizophrenic, internal dialogue. I resolve the tension between interpreting and analyzing and remaining true to the voice (or more perhaps more accurately and problematically, the understanding) of informants through rigorous coding²⁷ and by applying my own personal “acid test”: Can I defend this analysis, not to an academic audience but to my interviewees who may not like my findings that, for example, erotic dancers draw on, and thereby legitimate, racialized scripts (Bruckert 2012).²⁸ Their disapproval cannot muzzle the researcher: being respectful also necessitates that we respect our participants' ability to be self-reflective and to engage critically – anything less is offensively patronizing.

Marginalized people are savvy; they are not particularly impressed with our academic credentials (indeed, does anyone except academics know, much less care, about the difference between a full and assistant professor?) or our CVs. Like all social actors, however, they desire honest engagement. As researchers, it is imperative that we are as forthright and as transparent as possible – about our research, our goals, our intentions, and what we can realistically give back to the community. This necessitates that we do not inflate the significance of our project or make false claims regarding the genesis of our research.²⁹ Nor should we carefully wordsmith academic research into *community* partnership, tacking on carefully crafted letters of support from community groups to bolster our funding applications.³⁰

The third principle of sharing speaks to the imperative that all our human-subject research must meaningfully “give back” to the particular community according to the needs they identify. Writing academic articles and presenting at international conferences in exotic locals does little to improve the lives of the individuals who entrusted us with their stories. Sharing means not hoarding data and saving it for those all important peer-reviewed articles – not only are they largely inaccessible to community members who do not have access to university databanks but the they take a long time to be released. If we really do have useful information, then we have the obligation to

write a report, post online, create information sheets, hold a forum, do a press release, or any other of the myriad ways that we can share the information we have extracted with and from the community. That these forms of dissemination do not count in the academy is a pity – it is not an excuse.

That said, sharing is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour and necessitates creativity and community collaboration to envision substantive (e.g., providing educational materials, writing articles for grassroots organizations, editing a funding application) and less tangible strategies (e.g., advocating when called to do so, supporting individuals in the community, providing access to educational capital, showing up at a rally). Other times, sharing means sharing skills, knowledge, and access. Knowledge transference is not a rhetorical device to ensure one's funding application looks good; nor is it code for telling people what to do. It is about sharing. Sometimes sharing entails exploiting one's privilege, status, and all the markers one holds so dear in the interests of others even at our own (or our career's) expense. Marginalized people do not need us to give them voice: they have their own. They do, however, need us to get off the proverbial soapbox – or at least share it.

The fourth principle, speaking up, is about walking the walk. Talking is easy – waxing eloquently and critically in university lecture halls to students who carefully transcribe and subsequently reproduce our words and ideas at the end of the semester is as risk-free as it is ego affirming. Conferences and academic papers are similarly insular – evoking at most a lively (and generally respectful) exchange of ideas.³¹ By contrast, speaking out publically, standing up, and/or taking action for the rhetorical ideals we spout with such assurance can have real negative repercussions – to our carefully massaged reputation, our careers, and/or to our freedom. Speaking truth to power is, of course, personal (and therefore difficult) for those of us in the academy when the power in question is our institutions (who can deny tenure/promotion; or in the case of students, degrees), other academics (who review or evaluate our work), or funding agencies. We need to take our lead from the bravery of those academics who refuse to relegate justice to a disciplinary regime. Russel Odgen, who, as a master's student researching assisted suicide (see Chapter 1, this volume), risked contempt of court to be ethical and protect his research participants and then sued Simon Fraser University (SFU) for failing to support his principled stand comes to mind immediately.³² Others, such as John Lowman and Ted Palys, who have not only taken on SFU (their own institution) for its failure to support Odgen but have also risked the ire of other academics and the threat of a libel suit in order to expose questionable research protocols at Kwantlen University College.³³ Their chapter in this volume documents the shocking lack of ethical oversight and the jaw-dropping

double standard (and doublespeak) of the institution's administrators is academic activism at its finest.

Finally, one has to know one's place. Clearly, I have struggled with how to position myself, how to conceptualize my identity, and especially how to negotiate the fragile insider-outsider terrain. Sometimes, however, knowing one's place is straightforward though not easy – it is simply a matter of checking one's ego and inflated sense of importance at the door and being prepared to invest countless precious hours doing tedious (and decidedly unglamorous) tasks: photocopying, editing funding applications, counting condoms, making red ribbons, designing and posting flyers, or standing outside at yet another rally, vigil, or protest held on a cold Canadian winter evening. All of these contributions are important for the community; none of them are recognized or rewarded by the academy. I am reminded of my good friend and former colleague Professor Robert Gaucher who spurned publishing in his own name and instead started the *Journal of Prisoners on Prison* (see also Gaucher 2002). He invests his time and remarkable intellect in ensuring prisoners voices have a forum to be heard. He does not aspire to mediate and give voice (in fact, he would say it was not his to give and a mediated voice is a questionable voice at best) but to facilitate and amplify the voices that he respects and acknowledges as the experts.³⁴ He knows his place.

Whose Side Are We On?

In 1967, American sociologist Howard Becker famously asked, "whose side are we on?" (239). Today, almost fifty years after this seminal *Social Problems* article was published, the question still resonates. In this chapter, I have come out about my conflicted identities and (metaphorically speaking) disrobed – shamelessly displaying myself (warts and all) and inviting inspection.³⁵ To what end? Because, quite simply, I believe that we must, on occasion, put ourselves "on the line" and "get naked." And because, while cognizant of tensions and contradictions, I nonetheless firmly believe that rendering the invisible visible is not restricted to exposing the underbelly of the "other." I am confident that what academics do (or do not do) matters (a bit). I am convinced that when we hyper-privileged "talking heads" blindly reproduce academic conventions as gospel, when we fail to render visible the advantage we derive from the normative order, when we neglect to investigate our own complicity in social structures that delegitimize our research subjects, when we do not challenge power relations through our research, when we hide behind sanitized pseudoscientific paragraphs in our peer-reviewed articles, when we unthinkingly reproduce and reinscribe power relations in our research practices, and when

we mask our careerist ambition behind empty rhetorical phrases of “giving voice” – then (in)actions have spoken loudly, and Becker’s rhetorical question has been answered.

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Notes

- 1 Indeed, I am a clumsy dancer, and then, as now, remarkably inept at casual social chit-chat. This was a significant disadvantage in an industry where finely tuned interpersonal skills are essential.
- 2 Elena Jeffreys (2011) refers to this as “tragedy porn.”
- 3 For me, sex work is fully consistent with the feminist focus on women’s choice. I was to find out that this put me in conflict with feminist orthodoxy of the time. Indeed, even the excellent 1987 text *Good Girls, Bad Girls* is subtitled *Sex Trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face*, which suggesting two discreet populations. In the intervening thirty years, as a result of sex workers claiming feminism as their own and third-wave feminists engagement with sexuality (see, for example, Johnson 2002), things have changed. That said, the bifurcation of feminism and sex worker rights continues to echo in prohibitionists accusation of complicity in the violence experienced by sex workers. For example, the following comment appeared in response to a media article in which I was quoted as defending the rights of sex workers: “Bruckert – how dare you – when women are being sold and trafficked as ‘sex trade workers’ in your ‘industry’” (*Ottawa Citizen* 2010).
- 4 This film, which includes interviews with such noted antipornography feminists as Robin Morgan, Susan Griffin, and Kathleen Barry argues that pornography degrades and objectifies women and therefore is harmful to all women, most especially the sex workers themselves. The plot line revolves around the journey of Linda Lee Tracey, a proud and defiant erotic dancer, and director Bonny Klein’s exploration of the genre – what Tracey (1997, 202) later referred to as “Madonna and the Whore Do Pornland.” Notably, Tracey, who went on to become a documentary filmmaker, felt betrayed: “I felt exploited, the same way the filmmakers say pornography exploits other women” (*ibid.*, 203).
- 5 Here, I am referring to Foucault’s oft-quoted assertion that “where there is power there is resistance” (1978, 95).
- 6 This is a tricky location. The convergence of the academic fashion that gave rise to a valorization of the experiential voice conflicts with the conventions of the academy that marginalize. In the case of sex work specifically, the subject has become increasingly researched.
- 7 The title is an intentional reference to Monica Russel y Rodriguez’s (2002, 347) excellent article “Confronting Anthropology’s Silencing Praxis,” in which she addresses the binaries in her identity as “the Chicano among feminists … the newcomer in academe, the over-educated at home”
- 8 Prostitution prohibitionists seek to abolish the sex industry. For those from the “righteous right” this prohibition is based on moral arguments. For feminist prohibitionists, it is based on the profound belief that sex work undermines all women’s equality by positioning men to buy “one representative member” (S. Jeffreys 2004; Barry 1995).

- 9 The language here is intentional. The evaluations appear to be almost instantaneous and the process lacks the public element so important in Garfinkel's (1956) conceptualization. For all that, the experience (and repercussions) are profound.
- 10 The report *Challenges: Ottawa Area Sex Workers Speak Out* (2010), coauthored by Frederique Chabot, was based on forty-three interviews with sex workers (twenty-seven of which were street-based). The sampling, data collection, and analysis were careful and rigorous, meeting and exceeding disciplinary standards.
- 11 *Bedford v. Canada*, 2010, ONSC 4264 (CanLII). This is not to negate the contribution of the expert witnesses whose empirical evidence was invaluable to Justice Himel in reaching her decision. Moreover, I firmly believe the pioneering work of Fran Shaver and John Lowman opened the door for a generation of researchers who have had an important impact on the discursive framing of sex work issues.
- 12 This is not to say that my background (and activism) does not mediate this stigma. More important, however, is my public identity location.
- 13 While there appears to be a contraction in Foucault's assertions regarding power relations and power knowledge, in fact Foucault (1988, 1) does not discount issues of authority: "Relations of power are not in themselves forms of repression. But what happens is that, in society, in most societies, organizations are created to freeze the relations of power, hold those relations in a state of asymmetry, so that a certain number of persons get an advantage, socially, economically, politically, institutionally, etc. And this totally freezes the situation. That's what one calls power in the strict sense of the term: it's a specific type of power relation that has been institutionalized, frozen, immobilized, to the profit of some and to the detriment of others."
- 14 Reverse stigmas are stigmatic assumptions that invert social stratifications – "bottom up" as opposed to "top down." Goffman (1963, 3) explains "that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither credible, nor discreditable as a thing in itself." For example, high educational attainment may be seen as indicating intelligence, a solid work ethic, and laudable ambitions by the middle class but self-indulgent, pretentious, and reflecting a disinclination to do "real" work by working-class audiences. The existence of these reverse or inverse stigmas does not however negate the realities of social stratifications, and, while inverse stigmas may be interpersonally significant, they are not embedded and affirmed structurally (Hannem 2012). Moreover, operating within existing power-knowledge dynamics they are not afforded the status of "truth" in dominant discourse.
- 15 I am intentionally drawing a distinction between students who do sex work and sex workers who are students – a distinction that has experiential, ideological, and perceptual significance. Indeed, the two groups have different standpoints. While the former can assume a relational identity location (Trautner and Collett 2010), sex workers who become students negotiate a much more complex and layered identity location.
- 16 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, there are two meanings of *whore*: a prostitute; and to debase oneself by doing something for unworthy, often monetary, motives.
- 17 For more on intragroup stigmatization, see Hannem and Bruckert (2012).
- 18 Of course, the irony is that there is no way of realizing the positivist dream of a "representative sample" in a hidden criminalized, stigmatized, and marginalized sector such as sex work. The same is true for many other populations, including the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. All of which merely confirms that the positivist ideal of representativeness does not apply to all research. Representativeness does not, indeed it should not, be equated with rigour.
- 19 See de Leeuw, Cameron, and Greedwood (2012) for critical reflection on the demands participatory community-based research places on Indigenous communities.

20 Some sex worker rights groups such as SPOC (Sex Professionals of Canada) and POWER (Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work, Educate and Resist) restrict their activities to advocacy and/or public education only while others, such as Maggies and Stella, also provide services. The former are largely unfunded while the latter find themselves perpetually applying for funding to provide services such as bad date lists, hepatitis A and B vaccines, information guides, and self-defence classes (for more on this, see Clamen 2009).

21 There is a significant irony in this. Historically, conventional wisdom held that research on sex workers focused on the most marginal street-based workers who could be accessed in prison or through social service providers (Weitzer 2005). Today, the existence of sex worker rights organizations has rendered indoor workers assessable. In short, sex workers' resistance may have created the conditions of possibility for their over-research; as we know from Foucault's work on the emergence of the "disciplines" (Foucault 1977), a "captive" population is a potential object of "knowledge."

22 Credit to the late Liz Elliott, who drew my attention to the difference between research travellers who immerse themselves and research tourists who slip in and out of geographic, social, and/or cultural spaces and (somewhat voyeuristically) "see" the exotic highlights.

23 There is, of course, a profound irony (perhaps hypocrisy) here. This chapter will be carefully catalogued on my resume to justify my own academic production.

24 Instrumentality is not to be confused with exploitation. Critical and feminist social science researchers have long struggled with the tension between friend and participant as they endeavor to navigate the research relationship in a non-exploitative manner (see, for example, Sjoberg and Nett 1968).

25 I, for one, have received far too much of my education from workers who have patiently taken the time to explain their reality to me and to challenge my, sometimes disconcertingly, normative assumptions.

26 For example, as Fine and Weis (2002, 293), "a couple of White women, a well-paid Thelma and Louis with laptops," remind us, "piercing fractures define life within communities" (271). Sex work is an occupational category, not a job description or an identity; not surprisingly, this "community" is no more immune than any other to the intra-stigmatization that reproduces hierarchical stratifications. These fractures can play out in research done collaboratively with a particular labour sector (e.g., dancers).

27 Of course, there is no claim that this is an objective process. Like all researchers, what I can see (and therefore code) is necessarily restricted by the conceptual channels to which I am attuned (see also Kirkwood 1993).

28 I have struggled with this conundrum. For example, the analysis of the interviews collected in the course of a community-based project with Dancers Equal Rights Association revealed that some dancers do not wish to be paid a salary and appreciate the autonomy engendered by the "freelancing" system – a result that was in direct conflict with the association's fight for erotic dancers to be salaried employees.

29 To illustrate the difference, I do much community-based research; however, I am also involved in a large SSHRC-funded project on sex work management. While I am confident that the findings will prove useful to sex working communities, I am highly cognizant that this project emerges from the academy and will first and foremost benefit the academics and students involved. I share this with the advisory committee comprised of community representatives.

30 At POWER (Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work, Educate and Resist), university-based researchers regularly approach us requesting letters of support for this or that funding application. Recently, one such offer came with the specification that we do not have to do anything else – leaving little doubt as to the purpose of the partnership.

31 Writing articles, except for the sting of a critical rebuttal that, let's be honest, opens up the possibility of more peer-reviewed articles, is also insular.

32 Odgen's fight to protect participant confidentiality did not end with SFU and has plagued his career. He continues to pay the price for his principled stance (see Lowman and Palys 2000).

33 The libel suit, described by Lowman and Palys a "Kwantlen-funded threat to sue the whistleblowers for libel if they did not swallow their whistles" (this volume), is a significant and destabilizing threat with potential financial, professional, and personal consequences. Their tenacity and courage in the face of this is noteworthy.

34 Melissa Munn (this volume) is another academic who endeavours to use her privileged position to amplify the voices of those who are, far too often, silenced or disregarded. A long-time advocate for prisoner rights, Munn launched an open access electronic Penal Press Archive in 2010 in order to disseminate this "primary source of prison history from within" (www.penalpress.com).

35 This process makes me uncomfortably aware of an internal tension. Shamelessly inviting judgment, I am fearful of rejection and exposure. I have been inspired by the lessons I have learned from the brave researchers who have come before me and remember the enthusiasm of my students about hearing the real stories of research and researchers (see, for example, Cegłowski 2002; Russel y Rodriguez 2002; Adams 2000; Hoyle 2000; Borland 1991; Patie 1991; Fine and Weiss 2002).

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